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UC Berkeley's CAL Prep is closing the achievement gap
"Early College" in North Oakland expands college classes in third year

(BERKELEY, CA) August 31, 2007 - Students of California College Preparatory Academy (CAL Prep), an early college middle and high school that serves low-income urban youth, co-founded by UC Berkeley and Aspire Public Schools, showed impressive increases in the California Standards Tests during the last school year and the API (Academic Placement Index) increased by 77 points. The intensive academics will expand in 2007-8 as the school's first 9th graders take two college classes as part of their core curriculum while college level Conversational Spanish continues to be offered to 7th-9th graders after school.

34.4 percent of CAL Prep students scored Proficient or Advanced in English Language Arts (up from 23.7 in 2006), and math proficiency almost doubled to 44.5 percent (from 23.7 in 2006). Further, on these grade level tests, which cover mastery of each year's new curriculum, students in grade seven gave the strongest demonstration of the school's positive path with 43 percent Proficient or Advanced in English Language Arts and 56 percent Proficient or Advanced in Math.

Based on these results, CAL Prep's Academic Performance Index (API) score rose by 77 points, to 725.

"We're very proud that many of our students are doubling and almost tripling their mastery of the core curriculum. Our collaboration with UC Berkeley is helping us continue to increase the quality of our instructional program so that in the future all of our students can show this kind of success," said Steve Liles, CAL Prep's new principal with 14

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years of teaching and 17 years as administrator of Sacramento area middle and high schools. The founding Principal, Michael Prada, continues as good friend to the school as Director of Student Services for Aspire Public Schools.

More than 60 percent of the CAL Prep student body is low income, and over 92 percent come from the African American and Latino communities. The rigorous and thoughtful curriculum, and extra supports with the expansion of two more college credit courses for CAL Prep's 9th graders, is helping CAL Prep students close the achievement gap.

Closing the gap. There are no admissions tests for CAL Prep. In fact, preference is given to students who will be the first in their family to attend college. CAL Prep is at the former site of the Golden Gate Elementary School on San Pablo Ave. at 63rd Street. Although students are primarily Oakland residents, students facing barriers to college-going are drawn from 15 cities (mostly along the Richmond-Fremont BART corridor).

Rigorous academics combined with intensive support from adults are a successful recipe for helping students catch up and then excel in their studies. In 2007, 22 percent more students scored Proficient or Advanced in Math than in the prior year. Although the percentage of English Language Learners doubled in 2007 to a third of all CAL Prep students, 11 percent more students scored Proficient or Advanced in English Language Arts than in 2006. Overall, CAL Prep accelerated the learning of at least two thirds of its students who scored Far Below Basic in either English Language Arts or Math the prior year.

Harry Le Grande, Interim Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, was not surprised by the news. "Fifteen UC Berkeley faculty members (from astrophysics to education) are helping design the school. Between 20 and 30 undergraduates are helping at CAL Prep each week as tutors, mentors and instructional aides. Student Affairs is proud to be a supporter of CAL Prep and a partner in their success."

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Skilled Teachers. Though parents and administrators appreciate students' academic achievements, an eighth grader recently told a Cal donor that her favorite thing about CAL Prep is "...the teachers come back!" At a time when urban schools are experiencing a dearth of qualified teachers to meet the needs of their students, CAL Prep experienced a 100 percent retention rate of teachers for the current school year.

"Dedicated, consistent teachers, Cal undergrads helping each week, and UC Berkeley faculty helping design the school are putting us on the right path" observed Graduate School of Education Dean David Pearson, a founding member of the planning team who also helped with recent staff interviews. "I was very impressed with the quality of new teachers hired as the school added the inaugural 9th grade, and proud that the connection to Cal motivated many of them to apply."

Jumping Ahead. In the last school year, fifteen 7-8th graders earned six college credits for conversational Spanish taught after-school by Berkeley City College (BCC) faculty. Their full year of college credit as middle school students is a unique accomplishment among the 77 "early colleges" opened with seed grants from the Gates Foundation, which brings college classes into the secondary school curriculum (usually of schools with no more than 500 students). This year, CAL Prep's inaugural 9th grade class is taking two BCC college classes as part of their core curriculum: Art History and English 201A.

"It is the breadth and intensity of university involvement which is helping to make such a difference," commented Astronomy Professor Gibor Basri, UCB's new Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion, who has been part of the campus' faculty team since planning began for the school in 2004. "There are seven UCB research and evaluation projects underway at CAL Prep and the 9th grade Environmental Chemistry class is being designed by the Lawrence Hall of Science in consultation with Chemistry Professor Angy Stacy. This is challenging work aimed at learning both new ways to eliminate the disparities in K-12 education, and how the University can help increase access to and success in higher education."

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Quick Facts: CAL Prep is an Aspire Public Schools charter secondary school currently serving grades 6 – 9 in North Oakland at the site of the former Golden Gate Elementary School. One grade will be added per year, reaching 420 students in grades 6 – 12 in 2010-11. Extended school year (Aug. 6, 2007 to June 21, 2008), a Parent-School Agreement and significant involvement with UC Berkeley are key elements of CAL Prep’s design. For more information about enrolling in CAL Prep please contact Principal Steve Liles at 510.658.2900 or steve.liles@aspirepublicschools.org.

For information about volunteering at or donating to CAL Prep please contact Marguerite Judson (Development Director of UCB Center for Educational Partnerships) at 510.642.9813 or mjudson@berkeley.edu.

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